

Civics Lesson Plan

Government and Its Functions

Time: 120 minutes

Purpose of the lesson:

This lesson is designed to serve as an introduction to a unit plan covering the concept of the issue of balancing individual rights on the one hand and social responsibility on the other. The lesson should guide the student towards understanding that the Washington State Constitution is a written document designed to mandate how government, through its structure and responsibilities, is to balance these sometimes contending forces.

Justification:

Students should understand that one of the key underlying principles of our system of government (and the interaction between individuals and groups within our society) is to chart a path towards a more ideal society while sailing between the banks of individual rights and social responsibility.

Lesson outline:

- ✚ Teacher engages in a display of an individual right (clipping toenails?) in the classroom.
- ✚ As the afflicted student objects to having teacher toenails clipped onto his/her desk the teacher will simply ask, “Don’t I have the right to do this?”
- ✚ Engage students in a discussion of why an act, appropriate in one arena is frowned upon in another and why that might be.
- ✚ It could be helpful to have the class create a list of individual actions that are appropriate in “private space” while not being acceptable in “social space”.
- ✚ Transition to a discussion about traffic laws and how this principle of individual rights versus social responsibility is evident.
- ✚ Guide a class discussion to uncover that the central difference between how the interplay of individual rights vs. social responsibility is governed in the area of interaction in family, peer, and community groups versus society as a whole (unwritten vs. written).

- ✚ Have the student write (without conversation) four actions, beliefs, or things that they think should be restricted to the province of the individual and four that should be a part of a social compact. Once the lists are completed two recorders place the responses on a white board. The lists themselves should generate controversy since the students will note (especially if the teacher develops a list ☺) that the same item may end up on both lists.
- ✚ Students should then be exposed to the uncovering of two things:
 1. The interplay of individual rights and group responsibility between people in family, peer, and cultural groups tend to be unwritten, while rights and interactions of people in society as a whole tend to be written.
 2. Individuals may disagree about what types of actions belong in the area of individual rights vs. group responsibilities.
- ✚ ***stuck here*** Ask students in small groups to create a short statement that reflects the underlying principle behind the development of particular laws (As a large group, school zone speed limits might work). No skating on sidewalks, movie ratings, BECCA laws, new driver restrictions, freedom of beliefs.
- ✚ After the presentation of the individual group's written principles the class should be guided to see that, to some degree, this is the purpose of the Washington State Constitution; providing a written expression of the balance between individual rights and social responsibility (in the form of government responsibilities).
- ✚ ****Have to actually look at the document in some detail first!!!!** Separate the state constitution into parts that are then given to groups, look for evidence of these two aspects and then tree map results.

Next: Utopian movement / an analysis of a current bill that covers a contentious social issue. / Could even study where political parties stand in this area on a couple of selected issues.